DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 164 478 SP 013 413

AUTHOR Mitchell, Bruce M.; Dodson, Edward
TITLE S.P.I.C.E. Workshop Model: An Approach to Alternative Programs for the Disadvantaged Gifted.
INSTITUTION Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, Calif.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; Black Leadership; Black Students; Cooperative Planning; Culture Free Tests; *Economically Disadvantaged; *Leadership Training; *Minority Groups; Parent Attitudes; *Program Planning; *School Community Cooperation; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Major problems associated with subcultural variations in school performance that interfere with the development of special programs for disadvantaged, gifted students are discussed. These problems include the difficulty of identifying gifted minority students by usual testing methods, the nature of programs that may be devised to benefit them, and obtaining acceptance of such programs by school authorities. A model program is outlined in an attempt to deal with these multiple problems. Development of "culture fair" tests is proposed as a first step in identifying students for the program. Recognizing the culture conflict between the powerless poor and the average middle class is an important factor in successful program planning. The cooperation of the family and the community is a desirable goal. It is emphasized that the responsibility for developing this program must be shared equally with the adult members of the minority group. (JD)

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An Approach to Alternative Programs For the Disadvantaged Gifted

Ed Dodson and Bruce Mitchell

Three major problems associated with sub-cultural variations in school performance conventionally interfere with the development of special programs for disadvantaged gifted students: (1) identification of the "gifted" minority student in school populations, (2) the nature of programs to be developed for those students, once identified, and (3) legitimization of unusual programs by school authorities. Each of these problems originates in a cluster of social decisions that shape the curriculum of the school, methodologies of instruction, the nature and content of testing, requirements for the recognition of "student progress," the professional training of teachers, the role of parents, the goals of schooling—in short, the parry and thrust of public education. Each of these problems is sufficiently complex to discourage the local school from dealing effectively—or even minimally—with the disadvantaged gifted.

Attempts to deal with these problems has resulted in the development and implementation of the following participation model:

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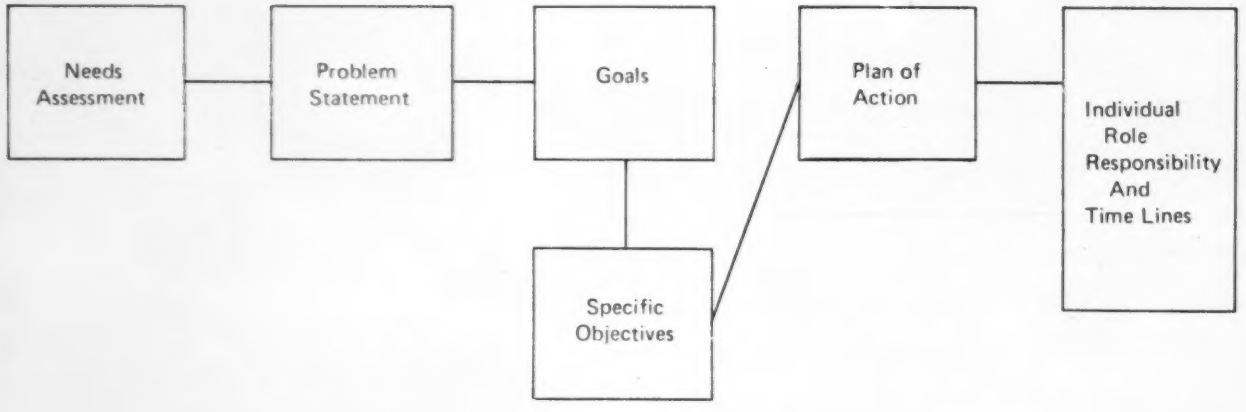
S.P.I.C.E. WORKSHOP MODEL



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Details of the model are explained throughout the following text. The simple model has proven effective in producing a social climate that is helpful in the development of a "coalition of care" consisting of thoughtful teachers, administrators, and students working with parents in the community. It is granted that this coalition rests upon good will rather than compulsion, except in those situations wherein litigation has focused attention on the programmatic needs of the minority gifted. The authors concede this fragility, and hold that it is a function of the social conditions that have, for generations, determined the shape of the problems identified above rather than to deficiencies in the model. Indeed, the model addressed the *milieu of learning* rather than the *psychology of learning* out of conviction that social circumstances underlie individual performance. The model has been useful in creating environments wherein all students are invited to perform, stretch their competencies, test the limits of their abilities. It has been observed that gifted minority students have received markedly greater attention, and have improved their performance in those districts wherein personnel have implemented programs developed out of the participation model.

The grounds for the authors' approach to the three problems identified above rest in three basic assumptions that are the *sine qua non* for approaching the minority gifted. The first assumption has to do with the identification of the gifted minority student. Much has been said about the usually poor performance of minority students in conventional testing situations—both IQ testing and achievement testing.

"Culture-fair" Tests not Universally Found

Attempts since the early sixties to produce "culture fair" or "culturally pure" tests have not universally found their way into testing procedures approved or monitored by many state educational agencies. In spite of such insights that have been generated by sociologically sensitive researchers (i.e., Cohen at the University of Pittsburgh) that hold great promise, conventional testing procedures retain their hold on the academic prospectus of most of our minority students. Further, there are scholarly questions as to whether or not conventional testing does bias against minority populations.[1] As Metfessel has pointed out, however,

> minority students in fact, for whatever reasons, are at a disadvantage in the school testing situation. In order to isolate and to take advantage of the intelligences extant in the normally pluralistic classroom, a variety of testing methodologies must be available, including those methodologies that do not necessarily conform to standardized scoring procedures. This is not to suggest that *all* minority students *must* conform to the pattern of poor performance on standardized tests. Many—especially those whose families have "cracked the code" of participation in the middle class—do, in fact, perform well. For those not in this group, whom we call the disadvantaged gifted, increasingly sophisticated sensitivity to the talents that are available, and a search for means of identifying and reinforcing these talents is mandatory.

The second assumption has to do with the nature of programs to be developed for gifted students. There is little agreement among practitioners and scholars about the nature of programs to be offered to such minority students. Johnson [2] states: "Programs designed primarily for the culturally disadvantaged children. . .should differ from programs for middle-class children only in structure and approach, but not in goals. . .the overall general objectives of education are the same for both groups." Johnson's remarks are obviously a reaction to the position of some educators that disadvantaged groups require programs with more "realistic" goals wherein success can be more instantly achieved and translated into utilitarian ends. Johnson's observations and concerns have been reinforced by public statements of a number of minority leaders whose disposition, correct or no, seems to be that inclusion of large numbers of minority students in career-oriented education reduces the potential for political and social leadership emanating from these groups. Career education is seen by many as a blatant attempt to solicit reduced aspirations from culturally different youth.

Neither the demand for similarity of educational goals, nor the easy reduction of goals for the "security" and "benefit" of the minority student takes into account subculturally imbedded values of the student. On the one hand, to rigidly insist that the goals of education are, or should be identical for all students is to ignore the life habits monitoring the student's relationship to his family, peers, and his community. On the other hand, to provide the student with only a minimum of skills that will enable him, under optimum circumstances, to economically "make do," is to condone the life of estrangement from power that already characterizes the culturally disadvantaged person. The fundamental problem with each of the above approaches is not the nature of the programs developed, but the lack of participation in program development by minority personnel. We must, if we are to effectively approach the disadvantaged gifted, stop developing programs *for* and begin to develop programs *with* those who are to participate. The disadvantaged gifted are not a "monolythic, unidirectional, single-valued interest group." Programs designed out of *characteristics of the disadvantaged* posited by those other than the disadvantaged, abstract themselves to death a-borning.

Obvious Diversity of Interests

The assumption addresses itself to the nature of the programs to be developed and rests on the obvious diversity of interests and values that characterize the disadvantaged gifted; any program developed must grow out of planning

involving significant members of disadvantaged groups working with the technical assistance of educators. Representatives of disadvantaged minorities must provide the conceptual base for the programs to be implemented.

The third assumption addresses the problem of the legitimizing of the programs generated. It is the responsibility of the school administration to routinize the academic life of the school into patterns that are acceptable to the state and to other educational institutions receiving graduates. An innovative program puts at stake the reputation of the instructional staff and the administration. At the same time, schools must become increasingly accountable for the soundness of their educational offerings. There are, however, in working with minority populations, some generalizations that ought to guide the perogatives of educational authority. Paramount among these is the experience of powerlessness that walks with poverty among the disadvantaged minority. Experience in control motivates disadvantaged minorities and allows them alternatives in their repertoire of social response. Dubey [3] has recently hypothesized that Blacks whose sense of powerlessness was high more frequently demonstrated "violent and criminal attitudes" than those with a low sense of powerlessness, and has made his case. Such destructive attitudes are adaptations to the experience of powerlessness whose function is to preserve the personal integrity of those perceiving themselves to be disadvantaged. The provision of opportunities wherein the disadvantaged may legitimately exercise authority is a first step toward utilizing their talents in socially, and individually, responsible ways. One may expect programs developed from the use of the model herein explored to be a product of consensus whose cornerstone is minority participation.

The third assumption, then, is that stylish and responsible educators will use their professional skills to translate the ideas for programs developed by disadvantaged minorities into viable educational conventions. This procedure enables minority populations in the school to gain valuable experience in authority, and, at the same time, provides the school with programs that are right on target to the expressed needs of the populations served.

Two issues are left to be dealt with in this introduction. The first is what the authors prefer to call a terminological problem. They are indebted to the useful conceptual device, "Culture of Poverty," primarily by Oscar Lewis[4] but, at the same time, are sensitive to the criticisms of concept spearheaded by C. A. Valentine and others.[5] In order to avoid the valuational problems associate with the pejorative use of the concept, the authors, where possible, have chosen to use the term "Poverty Powerless." By using this term, the authors have attempted to refer to an existential condition shared by the populations addressed, and do not imply any value appraisal of that condition by the minorities affected.

Ultimate Self-Propelling Model

Finally, the model could be criticized as "personality bound"—in that the effectiveness of the model is a contingency of the professional's expertise rather than the elegance of model design. The authors share with other professionals the desire for the ultimate self-propelling model, the final "teacher-proof" curriculum, the absolute administrative system whose functioning is independent of individual idiosyncracy. Unfortunately, we know of no such model, curriculum or system—but if and when we do, we will abandon our enterprise and simplify our work. But for now we admit the deficiency and share, with a significant fraction of other scholarly insights, the conviction that there is no surrogate for competency, especially when working with the volatile intelligences of the disadvantaged gifted.

As the introduction suggested, it requires an extraordinarily powerful device to break up the highly entrenched cycles of poverty which exist in the society. One of the key factors certainly appears to be centered around the involvement of the powerless. In most American societies, the powerless are members of the poverty culture. Depending on the geographical features of the area, powerless groups usually consist of minority subgroups. On some occasions, groups of whites are also found among the powerless.

Consequently, the goal of any significant cycle-breaker *must* be to include the powerless in the decision-making processes. Certainly, this is basic to functional participation in a democratic society since those affected by decisions must participate in their development. At best, this is a time-consuming and often frustrating exercise. But its importance must be stressed continually. Without such participation, effective change is usually impossible.

Englightening Insights

Newton Metfessel, Principal Investigator of Project Potential, revealed a number of enlightening insights concerning children from poverty culture which provide us with some reasons why these needs are not being met.

Such youngsters. . .

1. Typically have parents who do not have the language skills to enable them to foster their children's language and cognitive development.

2. Typically come from homes where there is a sparsity of objects such as toys and play materials of different colors, sizes and shapes.

3. Typically are crippled in language development because they do not perceive of the concept that objects have names and that the same objects may have different names. This may be one of the major reasons why poor children have later difficulty in coping with instruction in reading.

4. Typically lack a family environment in which questions are asked or answered. Consequently, these children do not perceive of adults in general as people from whom you ask questions and receive answers, a fundamental postulate on which the school culture is organized.

5. Are typically disciplined by physical force as opposed to insight building.

6. Typically are from an environment in which the school is perceived as being relatively unimportant.

7. Typically have had little or no out-of-school experiences which are translatable to the school culture.

8. Frequently have parents who perceive their status to be negatively affected by the child's education.

9. Frequently come from home environments where truancy is the norm.

10. Frequently have parents who communicate negative appraisals of the school because of their own school experiences.

11. Frequently have parents who communicate negative appraisals of the school establishment because of their own difficulties in coping with the school culture.

12. Frequently have parents who lack a basic understanding of the educative process to such an extent that the school is perceived as a place where "magic occurs," e.g., the child learns to read, write, and spell. One of the major benefits of having parental participation in school programs, particularly pre-school, is the eradication of this belief which occurs in inverse relationship to their understanding of the educative process.

13. Frequently have homes in which the physical environment mitigates against the development of listening skills, prompting the student to "tune out."

14. Typically are characterized by weak ego-development, a lack of self-confidence, and a negative self-concept. These conflicting feelings about themselves frequently result in exaggerated positive and negative attitudes towards others.

15. Frequently fail beacuse they expect to fail.

16. Frequently have had little experience in receiving approval for success in a learning task.

17. Typically are placed at a marked disadvantage in time test situations.

18. Typically use a great many words with fair precision, but not those words representative of the school culture. The role of the teacher is to explain alternative ways of saying things rather than one of rejection of the alien terminology.[6]

These findings provide a number of possible reasons for the relatively small number of poverty youngsters found in special programs for the gifted and talented. Title IV workshop participants at Eastern Washington State College consistently referred to this scarcity of poverty students in special programs for the gifted and talented. It is not really surprising that SPICE participants continually stressed a need for providing compensatory programs for poverty minorities with unusual academic promise but who failed to be classified as "gifted" or "talented."

Bringing about Community Change

Basically the SPICE model, used to develop multicultural education programs, is a participation model used for bringing about community change through the identification of needs, tasks, and responsibilities. It also provides organizations with an opportunity to involve the Poverty Powerless in key decisions which might provide useful ways of breaking entrenched poverty cycles. In most environments where it was used, a number of interesting conditions existed, as follows:

1. School boards and administrative personnel often believed that the demands for reapportioning students within districts resulted from "outside" interference with "internal" matters.

2. Instructional staffs felt their direct relationship within the classroom qualified them for determining various curriculum matters. Judgments regarding their qualification for continuing in the teaching profession were drawn from such observable behaviors as *the capacity to maintain classroom order, achievement of students on standardized tests, and rapport with students*. The competent teacher found that the demands of instructional activities, professional development, and program redevelopment more than required his or her total attention. Teachers who participated in multicultural program development through the SPICE workshops found it to be an extremely time-consuming activity.

3. There is a standard conviction on the part of minority groups that regardless of *what* happens in the educational environment it will *not* be in their best interest since they comprise the powerless segment of society. Also, it is now realized by minority factions that there is no common "Black" voice, or "Chicano" interest, or "Indian" view, or "Oriental" mind. Ethnic solidarity has yielded to the notion that those who have "made it" in the society have sold their heritage and have become "white." These groups thus become identified as part of the enemy. On the other hand, the minority leadership chosen by the power structure for recognition is that element which has opted to work within the system. The power structure has embraced this kind of conventional leadership in an effort to look good to meet various kinds of minority participation requirements. Unfortunately, due to such conditions, true minority representation is often absent when it comes time to negotiate educational change.

4. Finally, little attention is paid to the voices of those who *are most directly affected by learning in a pluralistic learning environment*. Students dutifully function on student councils which are invariably preoocupied with establishing dress codes and length of hair while the students within the schools often become more disaffected with each other, the curriculum, the school, and the world in general. Students have become "wise" to the ways of their elders and are either (1) demanding a real voice in the conduct of their lives with the school setting, (2) dropping back into the apathy of their parents of the fifties, or (3) dropping out of school altogether and looking for alternative methods of finding their community roles.

Share in Decisions

The SPICE model has provided an environment in which each of these groups has an opportunity to share in the decisions pertaining to majority-minority school relations. Planning sessions have required the participation of community members, students, principals, teachers, school board members, and superintendents.

Critical in the selection process is the inclusion of genuine membership from the minority community. Handpicked "token" representation must not be tolerated in the SPICE proceedings. Key poverty persons should be selected in order to insure that the needs of the *Poverty Powerless* are being considered in planning sessions. The same principle applies to the selection of teachers and students.

After securing appropriate planning team membership from the various school constituencies, it is necessary to consider the function of the SPICE planning model. Usually, it is essential to begin by providing group motivation through the use of a credible poverty/minority "input" person to deal with some crucial school topic pertaining to the educational needs of minority students. Participants then meet in small groups to analyze the remarks providing a focus for the events to follow. This activity allows people to deal with some of the critical issues of the school environment which come to mind through this minority input session.

The first step in the model is a needs assessment. After identifying a number of needs, the first main group task is to prioritize them according to their intensity, effect on the welfare of the children in school, and their programmability. Often, in order to develop an adequate needs assessment, it is first necessary to deal with the principles of brainstorming to engender a free flow of divergent ideas, thus increasing the number of existing needs and their ultimate prioritization. This process requires that the group settle on one or two identified needs deemed to be most crucial.

The next step is to develop a statement of the problem related to the identified needs. The statement must suggest a single programming potential and focus on a basic deficiency; i.e., "Teachers in Martin Luther King High School are unaware of the specialized needs of black students, which has resulted in a school dropout rate which is three times higher than the national average."

After developing a sound problem statement, a broad goal must be stated. The question is relatively simple and related directly to the statement of the problem, "What in connection with the problem statement do you wish to accomplish?" A sample goal for the previous problem statement might well be: "To reduce the dropout rate so it is commensurate with the national average."

Time-Phased and Quantifiable Objectives

After stating the general goal, it then becomes possible to identify a number of specific, observable objectives relating to the general goal. An acceptance level should be indicated as in the following examples:

1. To contact the counsel on a regular basis at least fifteen black students who have been identified as potential dropouts.

2. To inform teachers at Martin Luther King High School about the cultural heritage of black students in a series of fifteen seminars to be conducted during the 1977-78 school year.

3. To decrease the dropout rate of black students so that after the 1977-78 school year it is no greater than that of white students in the school.

It should be noted that these objectives are time-phased and quantifiable. They are easily measured and evaluation is practically automatic.

Outlining a plan of action is the final step. Here, it becomes necessary to develop actual operational strategies which will lead to the attainment of the objectives identified. Precise times are indicated for the performance of specific tasks.

Experience in dealing with Title IV programs such as these has convinced the authors of the versatility of the planning model. Multiechelon participation in the production of action plans virtually guarantees the development of learning and service projects which mean something special to all the participants. The literature abounds with the rhetoric from various studies which testify to the importance of learners taking much of the responsibility for deciding what they want to learn and how they will learn it. Use of the SPICE model provides for this.

It is necessary to utilize a model such as this one in developing suitable curriculum programs for the gifted and talented minority child. Instead of using the model to develop social action plans, students/ teachers/ school personnel/ community persons/ board members can use the model as a means of planning curriculum programs. For example, in one of the Indian schools where the SPICE model

was utilized, five gifted Indian high school students were charged with the responsibility of conducting a class in Indian Myths and Politics, to be presented to a large group of white educators. It was necessary for the students to become involved in research, planning, implementation, and evaluation activities dealing with the subject matter they presented.

The highlight of the program was the manner in which these youngsters prepared for their session with the teachers. They were brought to Eastern Washington State College where they worked with Title IV school desegregation consultants from the School of Human Learning and Development. In this milieu the students utilized the SPICE model to plan their presentation. They identified a goal and then brainstormed a number of action alternatives for program implementation. Actually, they were involved in all six levels of the cognitive taxonomic classification scheme developed by Benjamin Bloom. They utilized creative problem-seeking and creative problem-solving approaches.

Significant Attitude Changes

The results were most gratifying. For the first time in many of their lives, the Anglo teachers were learning a new perspective of educational process from the Native American Indian's point of view. These new insights resulted in a number of significant attitude changes on the part of the participants.

In this manner, gifted minority students can use the model as a procedure for creative problem seeking and creative problem solving. Participants consistently must deal with the higher levels of cognition such as synthesis and analysis, in addition to a variety of affective tasks. Thus, the gifted minority is provided with a vehicle which is capable of injecting a higher level of relevance into the teaching-learning process.

Currently, a number of additional identifiable programs are operating as a result of the initial use of the SPICE model. Some of the more ambitious efforts were focused on a California school district which sought to help its teachers develop a multi-cultural perspective in its curricular offering. The schools developed a number of useful programs through the utilization of the SPICE models. Some of the more interesting goals were identified as follows:

1. To bring our geographical communities closer together.

2. To increase communication among non-English speaking children and parents and non-Spanish speaking staff.

3. Integrated students and their parents will identify with the school they attended.

4. To reduce the percentage of the school population which has learning difficulties because of language barriers.

Obviously, these goals do not pertain directly to the "gifted disadvantaged" student. However, it must be remembered that a percentage of these youngsters must be considered to be gifted and/or talented. Consequently, when one examines the various components of the plans of action, it can be seen that gifted minority students were extensively involved. Some of these plans are described as follows:

1. Have students make presentations before service clubs, school boards, etc.

2. Set up a cultural resource center in the school.

3. Arrange cultural exchanges with other schools.

4. Bilingual aides will give English instruction to non-English speaking students.

5. All staff members will be able to verbalize at least twenty Spanish phrases in four weeks.

6. All students will be able to use at least ten new Spanish words in one month.

7. All faculty will participate in a multi-cultural workshop.

8. All communication in writing to parents will be written in English and Spanish.

While these programs were designed to nurture and develop positive schoolwide attitudes, the involvement of gifted students in their development was critical. Obviously, if the model is to provide the participation necessary from all factions, it is important to utilize highly gifted students in this planning/interaction process. These youngsters, cast into such an environment, are able to utilize their higher level thinking skills in the problem solving process promoted through use of the SPICE model. Moreover, the literature abounds with solid evidence that the most effective learning occurs when student can make viable decisions about the content of their learning and the manner in which they go about it.

Futuristic Leadership Skills

Another interesting example of the model utilization can be seen in a program found in a south-central Washington school district. The primary goal of that project was to develop futuristic leadership skills with gifted and talented sixth and seventh grade students. One of the curriculum strategies centered around leadership and problem-solving skill development. The idea for some curricular segments developed by one of the authors was partly generated through the district's involvement in the Title IV School Desegregation project initiated by Eastern Washington State College's School of Human Learning and Development.

Students are given a scenario which requires them to utilize the SPICE model in a simulated problem-solving sequence. A mythical fifth grade teacher is forced to curtail her bilingual/bicultural education program. The cast of

characters and events provide students with the opportunity to develop a problem statement, goal, and ultimately a plan of action for solving the problem. This allows gifted and talented students to sharpen their higher level thinking skills and have their creative problem-solving talents. (Most important is that these strategies have the capacity to help the minority gifted student nurture crucial leadership skills which have in the main historically remained in a latent state.)

In summary, the authors feel that the model has demonstrated the capacity to aid the minority gifted student in breaking the cycle of the Poverty Powerless. The fact that gifted and talented minority students can participate in planning their educational programs through the use of the SPICE model increases the likelihood that such students will become more active participants in crucial learning processes. Also, the model facilitates the refinement of creative problem-solving and higher level thinking skills so critical in the lives of such students. If the Poverty Powerless are to escape ennui, it is the gifted/talented from their ranks who must lead the way.

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Ed Dodson
Superintendent
Inchelium School District No. 70
Inchelium, Washington

Bruce Mitchell
Associate Professor
Eastern Washington State College
School of Human Learning and Development
Cheney, Washington